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The Bedouin of al-Qasr idealize the life of the pastoralist. It is a dominant theme in their culture. Gardening and arboriculture are perceived by the Bedouins as involving long hours of work, anxiety over waiting for profits, and complex market operations. They understand the logic and operation of the sheep market. Sheep are a store of value, a source of security, and a medium of exchange. In a good year of rain, a man can reap a good crop of barley, and buy more sheep against the inevitable bad year to come. While most Bedouins are, in one way or another, involved with the modern cash economy which ties al-Qasr to Marsa Matruh, the Bedouins who go into the production of cash crops on a large scale are those who can afford the risk of failure and who can survive the meager profits of the initial stage. These are the men who can adjust their world view from that of the pastoralist to that of the entrepreneur. There are only a few of these men in al-Qasr but they dominate the economy. Through them, most of the Bedouins of al-Qasr are linked to the national economy.

Land and Economy

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178

The period between 1960 and 1964 was one of significant economic change in al-Qasr. Dependence upon farming increased while pastoralist activities became less important. In the past, none of the Bedouins now living in al-Qasr were "nomads;" even my oldest informants had moved only once or twice to

Cases

462 424 them or any innate aptitude for them; this insistence is an index of the jealousy with which she is prepared to guard her rights. Each right derived from this or that small task is an extension of her control over the male.

462 424 252 The force and significance of this control is, perhaps, best seen in a woman's right to cook. At marriage a woman must have at least the minimum of cooking utensils, and one of the rights a man acquires in a woman is that she cooks for him. This is something a man cannot do for himself. [593] Therefore, when a man ill-treats his wife or threatens her with divorce, she can retaliate by refusing to cook, or leave the tent altogether to return to her father. A man bereft of this service is in a very sorry plight indeed. The legal dominance of the male, seemingly autocratic, is reduced at every point by the control a woman exercises through her exclusive right to perform tasks. The limits to the area of her coercive powers are significant. 562 They are confined almost wholly to domestic relationships. Legally, women suffer such disabilities that they are almost of the status of minors; in reality, their day-to-day living is far from intolerable because they are able to control males over a wide field of relationships.

462 424 231 Men, excluded in the main from domestic duties around the tent, perform tasks to which their legal rights are tied. While women have access to wells for water used by human beings, the transport of larger quantities of water over longer distances, requiring the use of camels, is a task which falls to the men. Watering of animals is done by men. Only they can slaughter the animals for food. The meat of an animal slaughtered by a woman is not "free," in a ritual sense, for human consumption. In an extremity only, a woman can, in effect, kill an animal, but the knife which cuts its throat must be held in a male hand, even if it is the hand of a very small boy. 462 The exploitation of the land is also the male prerogative. They [424] plough and sow the grain; incidental help may be provided by wives working [241] alongside their husbands during the early part of reaping, but the main reaping is done entirely by men. Transportation of grain to the mounds is also carried out by men, and it is they only who have access to the grain stores when quantities are withdrawn for family use. Sheep-shearing is [236] carried out entirely by males,[10] the fleeces are stacked by them and the [432] distribution and sales of these is directed by the male head of the tent.

Additional to these major tasks which males undertake are a number of minor ones. Men sew strips of cotton together to make clothes for both sexes. They also make rope of grass, albeit in a desultory sort of way, by [834] twisting together the strands between the palms of the hands. A number of [342] other tasks fall to the men by virtue of the fact that the sexes are separated in the tent by a divider of blanket material, which may be taken down when only members of the elementary family are about, but which is put

[461] [533] [538] [831] [10] This work is reserved for the younger men and takes the form of a festival during which lewd songs are sung and poems with obscene themes or references are recited loudly and within the hearing of elders, in a manner not dissimilar to the behaviour of bachelors at a wedding.